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ABSTRACT

This document reviews programs and policy initiatives in the following Northwestern States aimed at reducing the number of youth who are at risk of dropping out of school or remaining unemployed: (1) Alaska; (2) Hawaii; (3) Idaho; (4) Montana; (5) Oregon; and (6) Washington. The following regional trends are identified: (1) establishing collaboration between schools, businesses, and the community; (2) establishing business/education partnerships; (3) empowering local citizens; (4) listening to students' complaints, needs, and desires; (5) helping at-risk youth to acquire the skills they need for college; and (6) developing multifaceted strategies to counter dropping out and joblessness. Recommendations for policymakers are offered. Related Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) activities are discussed. A short bibliography of related NWREL publications is included. (BJV)

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Helping At-Risk Youth Succeed

Overview

What can we do about youth who are "at risk"--

- at risk of dropping out of school or remaining illiterate.
- at risk of becoming teenage parents.
- at risk of becoming dependent on alcohol or drugs.
- at risk of entering the criminal justice system.
- at risk of being permanently unemployed or underemployed.
- at risk of living on the streets--of never becoming socially productive human beings?

Over the past few years, educators and policymakers have focused increased concern on the educational and social problems of at-risk youth. Today, efforts are being made to better identify these young people--to address their needs through preventive and corrective strategies.

In this Ideas for Action we focus on youth who are in danger of dropping out of school or remaining unemployed. We look at what each state in the Northwest is doing to reduce these numbers by examining statewide policy initiatives and trends across the region. We also provide a glimpse of NWREL's current activities in this area.

To gather information for this report, we conducted telephone interviews with representatives from Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington--contacts located in the state superintendent's office, the vocational education department, the job training council, and the governor's office.

The result of our interviews was not intended as a comprehensive view of what exists, but a snapshot and overview of trends that are developing in early 1988. We hope it will help policymakers and practitioners obtain further information about good program ideas.

IDEAS FOR ACTION in Education and Work

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

December 1987

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Alaska

Governor's Commission on Children and Youth

A 22-member commission has been convened by Alaska's Governor Steve Cowper and asked to spend one year drafting and presenting recommendations intended to combat problems faced by the state's young people. The group also administers the Youth 2000 program, which is described below.

As part of its general mission, the commission will:

1. develop a plan for a good statewide child care system;
2. identify gaps and areas of overlapping in programs for children;
3. collect information about children's problems and needs; and
4. produce a comprehensive plan to combat these problems.

The commission was established in May 1987 after the legislature's Committee for Health, Education and Social Services held a week of hearings called the Week of the Child. It is divided into two groups: one is concerned with child care and the other with teenage pregnancy and parenthood, dropouts, suicide, domestic violence, runaways, and substance abuse.

Because of the state's size, much of the commission's testimony is gathered via audio conferences with citizens in small, remote villages.

Youth 2000

In addition to preparing recommendations related to the problems of youth, the governor's commission is in charge of three pilot projects in rural Alaska, designed to establish collaborative community efforts to provide service for at-risk Native youngsters. The projects are funded with federal Youth 2000 monies. The Native population group has been of great interest to the commission, whose members have made numerous field trips and corresponded with youth in communities, health and correctional facilities, and alternative education programs to see and hear their problems first hand.

Already, collaboration by various service providers on the commission has resulted in increased understanding of both the problems and values of working together in this field.

Youth in Detention

Facilities in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau provide remedial, special, and vocational education to incarcerated youth grades 7 to 12. The facilities are operated by the Department of Health and Social Services, while education programs are provided by the Department of Education through grants to local school districts. Vocational programs are accessible to youth as well.

Hawaii

Hawaii's Project 2000 Involves Multi-Agency Effort

In a program that began in the spring of 1987, Hawaii's systems of public education, employment and training, human services, and justice have joined forces with private employers and parent organizations to develop an innovative and coordinated statewide attack on the problems of at-risk youth. The project is intended to provide an impetus for strengthening school-to-work transitions for youth, particularly those "at-risk." The "Project on Children and Youth At-Risk," existing School-to-Work Trans-

ition Centers, and an upcoming WORK-HAWAII youth congress are involved (see below).

At Risk Prevention and Mainstreaming

One facet of Project 2000 is the Project on Children and Youth At-Risk, started in May as a three-way working agreement--between the State Department of Education, the College of Education at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and the Kamehameha Schools/Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate--to coordinate improvements in the regular curriculum and educational delivery system serving youth, especially youth at risk. It is anticipated that an augmented regular education curriculum will include a stronger school-to-work transition component for students after graduation.

Transition Centers

Preparing students for jobs is a thorough process at Hawaii's 12 Transition Centers, which are administered by the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. The centers were originally set up to serve students and faculty in the schools where they are located and, in the summer, to serve community members.

Now, as part of Hawaii's Youth 2000 initiative, the work of these centers will be expanded to additional locations.

Career planning at the centers begins with self-assessment services designed to enhance self concept development. Activities include counseling and career planning workshops, as well as use of personality, interest, and skills inventories.

Next, career awareness activities link the participant's sense of self to the world of work. Presentations at this stage of the career counseling process concentrate on career awareness, decision making, career counseling, and planning.

Career exploration follows career awareness and includes career shadowing, speakers, field trips, computer searches, volunteering, and work experience.

Job preparation and placement services help participants hone the skills needed to seek and keep jobs. This is accomplished through workshops, job referrals, work permits, and exploration of options available after high school.

At two of the centers, social and health services are available for students who find that problems in these areas are barriers to career planning.

Youth Congress

Although most conferences concerned with at-risk youth talk about them, the young people at a 1988 Hawaiian Youth Congress will talk about themselves. The Congress is being planned for them by WORKHAWAII, the Honolulu Job Training Program, which is conducting an intensive public information campaign on Oahu to promote the Youth 2000 initiative. The Department of Education and numerous other agencies are assisting in the planning. The Congress will inform at-risk youth of the realities of the workplace and ask the young participants to discuss their needs for employment training. Honolulu was selected as one of five Region IX sites for such conferences.

An extensive media campaign and a series of mini-seminars in local school districts round out Hawaii's public awareness program for its Youth 2000 project.

Idaho

Proposed At-Risk Pilot Programs

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Idaho has proposed state funding for pilot programs related to youth at risk. The proposal is supported by the Idaho School Boards Association, the Idaho Education Association, and the Parent Teacher Association.

Under the plan, a limited number of school districts would receive funds to develop and implement the first year of a multi-year pilot project that would:

1. identify those pupils who are unlikely to complete high school before age 19;
2. establish dropout prevention activities, including counseling and courses, that will significantly increase the high school completion rate of the previous five years;
3. identify young people of school age who are not in school and do not have a high school diploma; and
4. establish demonstration programs that will bring dropouts back to the classroom to complete their graduation requirements.

This proposal calls for $500,000 grants to each pilot project during its first year, with equal or increased grants during the next four years. At the end of this time, one or more of the successful projects would provide the framework around which future legislation would be written to address the continuing needs of at-risk youth statewide.

Montana

Diverse Populations Served

The Office of Public Instruction (SEA) provides technical assistance and/or funding to many local education agencies (LEAs) throughout the state who serve "at-risk" students through a variety of federal programs which include ECIA Chapter 1-Migrant, Title VII, Title VII Immigrant/Refugee and Title IV (National Origins). Districts qualify for assistance from these programs by identifying and/or serving children who are at risk of school failure because of their mobility (Chapter 1 Migrant), limited English proficiency (Title VII), National Origin (Title IV), or recent arrival to the United States (Title VII Immigrant/Refugee).

Migrant Youth

The Migrant Education Program provides supplemental, educational and supportive services for eligible children who have moved across state or school district lines with the parent or guardian who is seeking temporary or seasonal work in agriculture, fishing, or related work including food processing and the harvesting and cultivation of trees. When migrant children move with their families, their education is interrupted. These children represent many different ethnic groups. Because the particular needs of migrant children are not always met by the regular school system, migrant education programs are funded under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA Chapter 1). The program is administered through the Office of Public Instruction in cooperation with each local participating educational agency. Fromberg, Billings, Polson, Hardin, Hysham, Glendive, and Sidney are sites serving the children of migrant workers during the months of June and July.

Bilingual Services

The SEA annually applies for and receives funding from the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) in order to provide technical assistance and to conduct data collection of limited English-proficient students in the State of Montana. LEAs receive funding directly from OBEMLA in a competitive grant process. This year 12 Title VII projects have been funded by OBEMLA to provide services to children throughout the state.

Limited English-Proficient

Limited English-Proficient and culturally diverse students in Montana have been identified as "at-risk" students and school districts serving these students are provided technical assistance through the SEA's Title IV Desegregation/Assistance Program.

Populations throughout the state are provided services in a variety of ways which include direct technical assistance to districts who have students with language-based needs (teacher inservice, workshops, and materials), conferences for parents of "at-risk" youths, expressive language training for students who are "at risk", conferences for teachers of Hutterite children, and dropout prevention programs for Native American students.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Money raised through checkoffs from divorce filings and income tax forms is combined with private donations to fund the Montana Children's Trust Fund, which exists to fight child abuse and neglect. Funds go to prenatal education, parenting classes, sexual abuse programs, day care centers for families at risk, and high school programs for pregnant, at-risk teens.

Teen Mothers and Their Babies

The Montana Coalition for Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies is a group of professionals who are organizing local coalitions to deal with the problem of teen pregnancy and to pass information on to the legislature. The group has received a five-year Kaiser Family Foundation grant to survey existing services to pregnant teens and other high-risk youth and to establish local groups that can help. The coalition also maintains a Pregnancy Risk Line, which teens can call for information about chemicals and their dangerous effects.

Oregon

Student Retention Initiative

In January 1987, Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt appointed Barbara Ross, former Benton County Commissioner, to head the Student Retention Initiative, a program aimed at youth at risk. The Initiative involves collaboration between the Juvenile Services Commission, the Department of Education, the State Job Training Partnership Administration, and the Department of Human Resources.

The purpose of the Initiative is to replicate successful programs in many communities, so that Oregon's dropout problem is significantly reduced and greater numbers of students graduate or complete alternative programs. The state helps by providing:

- technical assistance,
- models of successful programs,
- strategies for securing local funding, and
- seed money.

A Youth Coordinating Council, appointed by the governor, recommends policies and grant awards, which can range from $30,000 to $60,000.

Local planning groups include employers, parents, youth recreation leaders, and representatives of several agencies concerned with youth, job training, and drug prevention. These groups work closely with school board members to assess needs and plan joint action. Decisionmaking about new programs takes place at the local level.

According to Assistant Program Director Ted Coonfield, the Student Retention Initiative has already had a tremendous impact on communities. In submitting proposals, many have said that the real value has been in working with other partners in the youth-at-risk arena.

Youth 2000: Business Liaison Project

Twelve Oregon communities are using federal funds from Oregon's Youth 2000 project to establish public/private partnerships that can help at-risk youth. The grant was awarded to the Governor's Student Retention Initiative by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The program aims to bring business, community, and education leaders together to create services and programs that help solve problems faced by at-risk youth: dropping out of school, drug abuse, pregnancy, inability to get jobs, low self-esteem, and alienation.

Portland's successful Leaders Roundtable is serving as a model for the Youth 2000 project. The Leaders Roundtable--a group of business, government, and school leaders--has implemented the Portland Investment, a plan of action targeting youth--especially at-risk youth--from birth to age 21. The Portland model illustrates the essential role businesses must assume in their communities for the sake of their youth and their future work force.

Beyond High School

Oregon's Regional Cooperative Vocational Technical Education Program advocates combining two years of high school and two years of community college in a carefully articulated program designed to provide young people with the skills they need to enter the job market. While not designed specifically for at-risk youth, many of the programs serve this group.

Variations on the 2 + 2 model are currently being tried in 18 regions, where employers and educators are planning job preparation curricula that range from agricultural occupations to computer training. Indeed, 2 + 2 is seen by the Oregon Department of Education as helping to make "schools and colleges more appealing and of better service to at-risk youth and adults."

Washington

Washington Students Get SMART

SMART, which stands for Student Motivation in Academic Residency Training, is being developed by the Washington Youth Employment Exchange in response to general education initiatives from the governor and legislature. The program will use job training and higher education funds to correct deficiencies in basic skills, employability, and attitudes toward the community. It is anticipated that after two years as a demonstration program, SMART will serve many at-risk youth throughout the state.

SMART, modeled after the Texas YOU program, will take at-risk youth to college this summer (1988) to acquire academic skills and earn academic credit. Over 150 students between the ages of 14 and 16 will be housed on three college campuses for eight weeks.

Summer days will be full for SMART students, who will spend the morning improving their reading, writing, and mathematics skills; acquiring study and time management skills; exploring possible careers; and--it is hoped--developing a "thirst" for learning.

In the afternoon, these youngsters will work on campus or in the community in jobs for which they have interviewed. The interview process itself will hone their ability to present themselves well and provide the basis for discussing the hiring process.

After work, students will take on community service projects such as writing letters for elderly shut-ins or working with handicapped youngsters. This kind of activity is being included to give at-risk youth opportunities to experience another kind of success and see that work for pay is not the only worthwhile activity to which they can aspire.

Evenings for these young people will be spent in student government (a new experience for most), in hearing speakers, and in going on field trips.

Youth 2000

Health, self-sufficiency, and productivity for youth are the aims of Washington's Youth 2000 project, which is getting underway with the help of four state agencies: Washington State Employment Security Department, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Washington State Department of Community Development, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The four are coordinating efforts to get local communities to identify issues and problems related to at-risk youth.

The program aims to:

- help health, education, and employment programs work together to provide more complete services and easier access to these services for youth-at-risk;
- reduce dropouts, teen pregnancies, substance abuse, and self-destructive behavior; and
- increase the number of job-ready youth who can meet the projected needs of Washington's employers.

This will be accomplished in three phases. First, planning groups will be formed in ten regions covering the state to host local Youth 2000 Regional Forums. The purpose of the forums, which will take place from December 1987 to February 1988, is to discuss local issues related to services for at-risk youth. In particular, the state is interested in having communities identify good model programs and specify the best ways that available resources might be used.

The second phase is a statewide symposium in April 1988, in which Regional Forum representatives and state and federal officials will meet to wrestle with the issues raised during phase one. It is anticipated that many of the issues will concern such logistical problems as state grant regulations and grant cycles that may be making cooperative agency/school-business projects difficult to undertake.

In June 1988, the third phase of the project, a statewide conference, will be held so that the state can respond

to local concerns with a set of new policy recommendations. At the conference, the challenge to "become Youth 2000 communities" will be issued.

Those who repond will be the "risk takers," the communities that are willing to test the new approaches recommended earlier. A final choice of participating towns and cities will be governed by the need to achieve a good mix of locations--rural, urban, fast-growing, slow-growing, etc.

Results from the pilot projects in these sites will be compared with results from communities pursuing old models, leading to state-level recommendations for a new plan to educate at-risk youth statewide.

Beginning in Kindergarten

Dropout prevention and intervention can begin as early as kindergarten when individual Washington districts apply for Dropout Prevention Program funds. The program began as the High Motivation Dropout Program--a pilot effort in 13 sites--and is now funded by the legislature as a statewide effort.

Noteworthy aspects of the program include the use of mentors, especially in Hispanic families, to head off feelings of alienation from school; help for pregnant teens; day care for children; tutors in various aspects of the curriculum; and cross-agency cooperation to deal with drug and alcohol use. Also, in addition to basic grants, districts can receive reimbursement for extended programming, such as Saturday and evening school.

Schools of Choice

Washington's alternative schools, Schools of Choice, have existed since the late 1960s to serve many different types of students across the state whose needs are not met in traditional classrooms. The program is administered by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Washington Alternative Learning Association.

Alternative schools in Washington are designed by individual districts and operate under local requirements, although guidelines for new programs are now being written. Most alternative schools rely on strong parent and community involvement, with parents often assisting in the classroom. High schools use individualized learning contracts and tutoring in addition to group instruction.

Each year brings an increase in the number of alternative programs in Washington, which now total 125-130.

Regional Trends

Collaboration, Collaboration, Collaboration

One of the most heartening new trends is the development of partnerships to help at-risk youth. Linkages take the form of interagency collaboration; business/education compacts, or roundtables; and broad involvement of the community.

Youth 2000 initiatives are establishing significant partnerships between agencies that serve youth on the state level and local community, education, and business leaders.

Business/Education Partnerships

Of special interest to those concerned with job readiness for youth is the involvement of business leaders in programs that seek to prepare at-risk youth for jobs. An example of the leadership being offered is the Portland Leaders Roundtable.

Empowering Local Citizens

Decisionmakers at the state level have devised a number of means to gather ideas from citizens and empower them to develop solutions to local problems. These range from the Alaskan commissioners' field trips and audio conferences to Washington's community forums and Oregon's local planning groups.

Letting Kids Talk Back

Adults are not the only ones capable of finding solutions to the problems of at-risk youth. In three states--Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii--the young people themselves are being asked to offer insights, either in personal interviews with decisionmakers or in youth conferences.

Taking At-Risk Youth to College

Academic proficiency remains the concern of programs for at-risk youngsters, and two of them--Washington's SMART and Oregon's 2 + 2--are making it easier for young people to move on to college in the hope that they will gain a new perspective on their lives, the world of work, and their ability to succeed in both arenas.

Strategies Against Dropping Out and Joblessness

Recognizing that at-risk youth face a complex web of problems, most projects have developed multifaceted strategies for attacking academic, emotional, job readiness, and health problems simultaneously.

Recommendations

Local and state level policymakers need to be aware of at-risk youth initiatives occurring or planned through various agencies within their state so that they can continue to assure collaboration. It is also useful to know what is happening in neighboring states so that legislation and implementation strategies can be shared. Regional gatherings such as NWREL's annual Work Now and in the Future conference in the fall become good opportunities for exchanging first-hand insights into effective strategies and solutions.

Since many of the states in the region encourage a grassroots approach to problem solving, it becomes important to understand what role state agencies can play in providing support and technical assistance. Despite wide variations in local program approaches, there are some common approaches to technical assistance that may be helpful. Meetings of state agency staff across the region ought to give consideration to developing policies and procedures for providing technical assistance to local communities in a timely and cost-effective manner.

As states move to funding local projects, evaluation designs will be needed that assist local agencies to better improve their operations and that encourage enhancing projects to be expanded and adopted for use in other parts of the state and region. To support this effort, multi-year evaluation efforts are needed that not only identify the impact of programs but uncover what exemplary features are contributing to the success of these programs.

Related NWREL Activities

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) is a private nonprofit corporation that assists education, government, community

agencies, business and labor in improving quality and equality of educational programs and processes by:

- Developing and disseminating effective educational products and procedures
- Conducting research on educational problems
- Providing technical assistance in educational problem solving
- Evaluating effectiveness of educational programs and projects
- Providing training in educational planning, management, evaluation and instruction
- Serving as an information resource on effective educational programs

NWREL welcomed 437 leaders in education, business, government, and health and human services to Portland, Oregon, March 4-5, 1987 for an At-Risk Youth Conference to examine policy issues related to potential dropouts, youth offenders, drug and alcohol abusers, teen parents, young children at risk, unemployed youth, and those in compensatory education. These leaders came together to examine collaborative efforts by schools, community agencies, and other groups as well as to explore specific topics related to youth, promising practices for high-risk youth, and juvenile delinquency prevention.

During the past year, NWREL has and continues to conduct a variety of research, development and demonstration projects to identify and implement effective practices for meeting the needs of at-risk youth.

A new series of research-based resources for use by educators in planning and implementing local school improvement efforts was begun by NWREL, with the first topical research synthesis in the series focusing on "Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth: What the Research Shows."

While research has given some significant answers about what makes schools effective, this synthesis asks questions about whether the techniques, processes and procedures which work in schools will also get results with at-risk youth.

The NWREL Database and School Profiling project is designed to assist states, local districts and schools in the development and use of information systems in policy and decisionmaking. NWREL has modeled the development and use of a large data-base directed toward a policy issue of central concern to its constituency--the prevalence of at-risk youth in the Northwest region.

The regional database compiled by NWREL consists of extant data from two basic sources. National data were acquired from the U.S. Census and Common Core of Data system available through the National Center for Statistics. State-specific data were acquired from each of the six states in the Northwest and merged with the national data for each state. They have the advantage of both recency and relevance to their states, but preclude interstate comparisons.

The NWREL report, "Identifying At-Risk Youth in the Northwest States" adopts a fairly broad characterization of at-risk children, and utilizes the information in the regional database to illustrate their prevalence within and across the six Northwest states.

The Fred Meyer Charitable Trust awarded a grant to NWREL to conduct a demonstration of literacy training for out-of-school youth. The grant allows

NWREL to build on its previous research on the literacy needs of street youth and make appropriate training a reality.

Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth is an NWREL project to facilitate the job of policymakers and teachers who are concerned about serving the growing number of children at risk of dropping out of school. The project is gathering and sharing information about effective dropout prevention strategies at the middle school and high school levels around the region. A wide range of strategies are included, from full-fledged district or statewide programs to classroom practices devised, implemented and improved by seasoned teachers.

The U.S. Department of Education in October 1987 awarded a cooperative agreement to NWREL for operation of the Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

The Center focuses specifically on providing training and technical assistance to local districts, state agencies and institutions of higher education to prevent and eliminate drug and alcohol abuse in schools. The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act--which is the source of funds--specifically identifies students at risk of becoming drug abusers as those who are school dropouts, have become pregnant, are economically disadvantaged, are children of drug abusers, are victims of physical or sexual abuse, and have mental health problems. Thus, NWREL will have a capability for developing plans and seeking support for additional activities which can evolve into a comprehensive program in the area of at-risk youth.

For further information about NWREL's activities related to youth at risk, please contact Dr. Rex Hagans at (503) 275-9543.

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Editor's Note

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